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REVIEWS

THE TUDOR DRAMA

When a new book is produced upon a phase of literary history which has been repeatedly and exhaustively treated, it should have the merit of either new and illuminating material or strikingly new method of presentation. The volume upon the Tudor Drama¹ recently issued is in its way voluminously interesting, but it seems to fall short of being a work for the expert scholar, and to be not admirably adapted to the general student. According to its preface, it is "a work which aspires to the notice of the undergraduate student and the general reader." In arrangement of material, however, and particularly in its style it seems to have been written *at* the leading scholars rather than *for* the developing student. For students' use the content of the book is most serviceable where it is most concrete, and where it is least obscured with discussion of critical cruces. The bibliographical pages which follow each chapter are very well devised and in a measure the best single feature of the work.

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THE CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL THEATRE

Not many books outside of fiction of a certain stamp find an audience ready to hand as Miss Herts's little book does²—a book to be considered, by the way, as the author frankly indicates in her preface, not at all as a specimen of literary art but wholly as a carrier of facts. During the past few years interest in things dramatic and discontent with present school methods, in the mind of the thinking public, have been jostled into awareness of each other, so to speak, with the result that all our schools—one might almost say all agencies professing to do with the education of young people—are filled with dramatic intention. Everywhere in high and even in elementary schools dramatic clubs are organizing and those already established taking on new activity; courses

¹ *The Tudor Drama*. A History of English National Drama to the Retirement of Shakespeare. By C. F. TUCKER BROOKE. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1911.

² *The Children's Educational Theatre* BY ALICE MINNIE HERTS. New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1911.

of study are including in their reading lists other plays besides the classic four or five of Shakespeare and *She Stoops to Conquer*; alumnae associations—here one must cling to the feminine—are turning to the production of plays as a means of keeping themselves alive; the Drama League of America is gathering huge numbers of teachers into its membership and has at least two departments looking especially to the interests of young people of school age; and in the city of Chicago there has, this year, been formally started by a group of people, many of whom are teachers, a movement looking toward the establishment of a young people's theater. But all such responses are young; they are often vigorous, but they are also vague; everyone is doing something, but few know exactly what. Happily, everyone wants to know.

To many of these watchers on the hilltops, Miss Herts's experience among the children of recently immigrated Russian and Polish Jews in East New York will not be entirely new. From time to time during the last five or six years, articles have appeared in various magazines giving more or less fragmentary accounts of her work. The book now appearing, however, small as it is—one hundred and fifty pages in large type, and close to one-half of this given over to excerpts from public statements of well-known lecturers and writers as to the value of dramatic work—will be of practical assistance to teachers in ways untouched, so far as I know, in print before. It gives a fairly consecutive account of the whole adventure, which, from 1903 to 1909 under the auspices of the Educational Alliance and finally as an independently incorporated organization, achieved such success as made its subsequent suspension from lack of means of support something like a tragedy. But its best value is in the things it tells us by the way.

One of the most suggestive facts in connection with the Educational Theater is the quality of the plays on which it thrives. The author tells us that when she took charge of the entertainment department of the Alliance she found that the most popular programs were concerts and amateur dramatic performances mostly of the cheapest sort, though there were some good plays among them. The elders gave their entertainments in their native tongue, the young people "in what in their vigor and enthusiasm they believed to be the English language." Wise woman that she was, she remained an inconspicuous observer for several months; then she stepped forward, combined and organized the various groups of players and musicians, and decided upon the *Tempest* as a trial piece! Her reasons are worth noting: "The play was chosen because its scenes are laid in Nature's own abode, significant contrast to

the tall, forbidding tenements of the neighborhood; because it teaches the lesson of the majesty and simplicity of nature, and the nobility of forgiveness." The other plays mentioned as performed to enthusiastic audiences were *The Little Princess*, a dramatization of Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett's *Sara Crewe*, *The Forest Ring*, by William de Mille, *Ingomar*, *As You Like It*, *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, *Snow-White*, a dramatized version of a German folk tale, *The Prince and the Pauper*, by Mark Twain. Smile who will at this assemblage, the step forward was Brobdignagian; but nobody, child or adult, seems to have had any difficulty with it. In a word, they would take anything they could get, but they preferred a thing that had sense and vigor and beauty.

Still more impressive is the patience and enthusiasm with which hard-worked young men and women and undisciplined, not to say "tough," boys submitted themselves to the discipline enforced during the weeks or months during which a play was preparing. Her account of a presentation night is inspiring: the hour of the play was 8:15, the players and all assistants were on hand at 6:45, and if anyone were absent fifteen minutes before the curtain was to rise, the understudy was entitled to play the part. Further penalty there was none; but during five seasons of regular Sunday matinees from October to June there were not half a dozen people who allowed their seconds to play. On the freedom of the audience, also, there were no checks except those imposed by themselves and by the interest of the performance. After the first two or three occasions there was no trouble.

Miss Herts's method of developing a production may be gathered from what is said of one or another occasion. Her first step was to engage an assistant with some experience both of "stage work" and of teaching, who organized classes in which the plays to be produced were studied. A play was chosen and a printed announcement made that applications would be received from persons wishing to take part. When these applications had been made—in the case of the *Tempest* production this meant about three hundred and fifty young people—a meeting was called to which all who had responded were invited, and the play was read. Then followed other general meetings, in which the plot of the play was discussed, the meaning of each character, the period at which the action is supposed to take place, each person present apparently receiving a typewritten copy of the part for which he or she had made application. Later these typewritten copies were made, when need arose, by volunteers from the army of candidates for places in the cast, or their friends. After the meetings came rehearsals, the

forming of several full casts, the assignment of the duties of property-handling, stage-shifting, prompting, and so on. As the enterprise took on permanency, the several casts played in succession, the members taking their turns also at the humbler duties behind the scenes; and this democratic procedure was adhered to, we are assured, on even the most special occasions—the cast whose regular “turn” it was played. In one production of the *Tempest*, one hundred and thirty young people were directly engaged; in the total number of productions of the same play during the season, over three hundred.

The value of all these things hardly needs comment. The author tries to get at what she is after in various phrases; she gave scope, she says, to “the dramatic instinct common to all young people,” she “trained the creative, not the imitative faculty.” Call it what one will, one can hardly read the book without feeling that this experiment has come near a solution of the problem how to bring the material of experience to children that they themselves may take it and turn it into joy and goodness and understanding. The children in this educational theater “created their parts” in a sense wider than is commonly carried by this phrase.

In the execution of this conception, there are points, of course, that invite questions. What amount of effort, for instance, is worth expending on “historic accuracy” as to dress and scenery? One fancies that the author deceives herself a bit as to the real character of her own work in this line; that what she really did was no more than arousing among the young people a lively sense of the situation they were to represent. And this would seem to be the important thing. Of course this is not saying that anything which incites the children to read and investigate for themselves is not admirable; in other situations than that described in this book, much more of the some sort of thing will occur to the alert teacher as possible. But language is deceptive, as we know, and the will-o-the-wisp of historic accuracy is likely to lead the unwary into a parlous chase. About interesting questions which arise when children are assisted to make plays of their own from familiar stories, nothing is said, and evidently nothing of this sort was undertaken.

It would have been interesting if the author had discussed more fully the effect upon the community of the successful carrying on of this devoted work through so many years. She speaks of the improvement in manners, speech, and personal habits among certain of the young people and especially of the change in standards of dress among the young women who played in *Fauntleroy*. The little glimpse we get

into the house in which had arrived the proud moment of setting up a "front parlor," is reassuring; instead of the cheap plush and gilt fashionable among the neighborhood, as close a reproduction as possible of the simple furniture selected by the director of the theater for the home of Fauntleroy's mother, was chosen. There is mention of parents' meetings, with programs and discussions, and some words on the interest shown by children and young folk classed in the community as vicious. About these things we should willingly know more. On the other hand, there is solace for the reader in the author's lack of effort to make out a case more perfect than the actual one.

The final chapter is chiefly devoted to an argument that children's theaters should be supported by private endowment rather than be attached to the public-school system, though they should be in close co-operation with the schools. The reasons given for this preference will be puzzling to most teachers of the Middle West: they are, first, that classes in educational theaters should always be coeducational, and, secondly, that membership in these classes should be not compulsory but elective. These will probably not be felt by most teachers the most baffling obstacles in the way of incorporating children's theaters into the town and city systems of schools; but it is fortunately not necessary to enter into this question—apparently at our doors, however—or even to agree as to the importance of "play-acting" in school, in order to appreciate the book as a contribution toward the solution of the larger question—in the words of a recent article in the *Atlantic*—of how to "dramatize education."

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BOOK NOTICES

[Mention under this head does not preclude review elsewhere.]

Essentials of Poetry. By WILLIAM ALLAN NEILSON. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1912. Pp. 282.

The Lowell Lectures for 1911. An original and very suggestive treatment by a thoroughly equipped scholar. In the course of the discussion, Professor Neilson clears up a good many critical difficulties, such as that of distinguishing sentimentalism, for example. Those who wish to get a fresh impression of poetry unbiased by biographical and other extraneous considerations may well read this volume.

English for Secondary Schools. By W. F. WEBSTER. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. Pp. 352. 90 cents.

A vastly more practical book than the older book by the same author. The gain is apparent especially in the matter of exercises adapted to secure efficiency in the forms of expression in common use.